

About Menopause

What is menopause?

Menopause refers to the time in a woman's life when she stops having a menstrual period and is no longer fertile. The time leading up to menopause is called the menopausal transition, or perimenopause.

During perimenopause, a woman's ovaries start to produce less estrogen and progesterone. Changes in these hormones cause symptoms of menopause. Periods occur less often and eventually stop. Although this typically is a gradual process that happens over time, in some cases, a woman's periods will stop suddenly. Throughout perimenopause, ovulation—the release of eggs from the ovaries—also occurs less and less frequently.¹

Menopause is the point at which a woman has not had a period in 12 consecutive months. The time after menopause is called postmenopause, a phase that lasts for the rest of a woman's life.

All women experience menopause, usually between ages 45 and 55.² The average age of menopause is 51, but it occurs earlier in some women. Women who smoke may go through menopause earlier than women who don't smoke.³

However, perimenopause can begin several years earlier when levels of estrogen and progesterone first begin to fluctuate.² Surgical or medical menopause is the term for a decrease in estrogen that is a result of surgery to remove the ovaries or uterus, or medical treatments such as chemotherapy or hormone therapy to treat breast cancer